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SUBJECT: ROSALES' PLANS TO DETER/DETECT ELECTORAL FRAUD

REF: CARACAS 003239

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Classified By: ACTING POLITICAL COUNSELOR DANIEL LAWTON,
REASON 1.4 (D)

11. (C) Summary. The Rosales campaign is preparing what appears to be well-organized and sophisticated electoral monitoring operations to deter and detect government fraud. Rosales' witnesses at election tables will be asked to help ensure that voting machines are not corrupted as well as transmit to campaign headquarters reported local returns. These reported returns will assist the Rosales camp to implement a "quick count" projection and to conduct an independent parallel tabulation. The Rosales campaign, however, still lacks trained volunteers in many areas and can currently deploy trained witnesses to only about 70 percent of the over 11,000 voting centers. The Rosales camp nevertheless claims it will be able to project accurate results of the December 3 presidential election before the National Electoral Council (CNE) completes its official tally. It is also prepared to put its people on the streets should the campaign detects significant electoral fraud. End Summary.

Preparing For the Worst

12. (C) Numerous opposition groups and activists, including Rosales campaign liaison to the National Electoral Council (CNE) Enrique Marquez and senior campaign adviser Diego Arria, have briefed the Embassy in recent weeks on their concerns about potential government fraud in the December 3 election. Drawing on "lessons learned" from the 2004 presidential recall referendum and Rosales' gubernatorial re-election, Rosales' electoral experts shared with us their strategies to counter potential fraud. Despite the fact that electoral logistics distinctly favor Chavez (Reftel), Rosales advisors are reasonably confident that the opposition will be prepared to detect fraud if it occurs. They also stress that the Rosales campaign is working hard to deploy trained ballot-watchers across the country to deter potential government fraud.

Fingerprint Machines

13. (C) The Rosales campaign continues to pursue a somewhat

contradictory strategy regarding the CNE's intention to use fingerprint (digital scanning) machines, ostensibly for biometric identification of voters. Rosales tells voters not to believe "stories" that the machines can be used to determine how people vote. At the same time, his campaign is also quietly trying to dissuade the CNE from deploying the machines in the seven largest voting states and Caracas, the only places the CNE plans to use them. Hedging their bets, Rosales' technical experts are participating in audits of the machines to validate their integrity. Rosales campaign liaison to the CNE Marquez told poloffs that the machines were originally used to track whether particular voters cast ballots in the 2004 presidential recall vote on a real-time basis, allowing the BRV to hone its get-out-the-vote efforts on election day.

¶4. (C) Although the machines are supposed to be off-line, thus preventing the CNE from tracking voters, Marquez said that the machines could possibly be accessed remotely. He noted that the government has been installing satellites dishes -- possibly with help from former CNE President Jorge Rodriguez -- in various neighborhoods as part of its program to make the internet more accessible. Many of the new satellite dishes, however, are near voting centers and Marquez opined that they could be used to connect and collect voting data from the machines. He thought Rodriguez might be setting up a situation room to coordinate such a collection effort and track voting results.

¶5. (C) Rosales advisor Diego Arria told the Ambassador and DCM November 16 that if the CNE does not decide to eliminate the fingerprint machines, then the Rosales camp will go public with information that the machines do not really prevent multiple voting. Arria said the Rosales campaign will also reinforce its public line that people should not be afraid to vote as the machines will not divulge how they voted. Arria said the campaign's polling data shows that 60

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percent of voters believe the machines can violate voter secrecy, but 90 percent of these same people said they did not care and planned to vote anyway.

Voting Machines

¶6. (C) Marquez told poloffs that Rosales' auditors had recently reviewed and approved the CNE's electronic voting machines and software. Moreover, the CNE eliminated each machine's archive of votes; the opposition withdrew from the 2005 legislative elections after a test showed that machines retained non-random vote sequences, permitting identification of voters' choices. Unlike during the 2004 presidential recall referendum, the voting machines should not be connected to allow them to transmit (or receive) information from the CNE's tabulation center. The Rosales campaign training video for poll watchers emphasizes that point. Rosales auditors had also reviewed the machines' various connection ports and verified that all but one could not be remotely accessed. At the opposition's request, the CNE accepted software to prevent the final port from being accessed by a wireless connection. Some Rosales advisors, however, are still concerned that newer Smartmatic machines could be accessed by the CNE remotely via wireless communication.

The Electoral Registry

¶7. (C) Marquez and other Rosales electoral experts concede that the upcoming election will be based on a flawed electoral registry, but do not believe it is so skewed as to change the course of the election. While the BRV forestalled a comprehensive, independent audit of the electoral registry,

opposition representatives were able to clarify, and sometimes correct, some of their concerns via two private studies and the CNE-sanctioned audit conducted by seven pro-government universities.

18. (C) Marquez said that during recent voter registration drives, the opposition succeeded in returning many registered opposition supporters back to their original voting centers from the new centers to which they were arbitrarily assigned.

The Rosales camp has also tracked down many of the voters who are listed without addresses and found that most had registered before 1988 when addresses were not required to register to vote. Most foreigners nationalized in 2003 resided in Zulia, but the Rosales team is still confident that Rosales will carry his home state, citing the Zulia governor's 2004 re-election.

Auditing the Results

19. (C) The Rosales campaign is focusing on the audit of all polling machines as its best chance to deter and detect electoral fraud, should it occur. After the polls close, local electoral officials will print an electronic tally sheet ("acta") that will state the number of overall number of votes cast and the number of votes (separated by party) cast for each party's candidate. Poll watchers will transport these "actas" to regional sites where they will be scanned and transmitted to the campaign's central situation room. Rosales Campaign Executive Secretary Ciro Belloso told pollsters November 17 that once received at the campaign headquarters, Rosales' volunteers will electronically scan these "actas" to facilitate a quick tabulation of results. Opposition activists frequently lament that they did not retain the "actas" after the 2004 presidential recall referendum to substantiate their allegations of electoral fraud. Marquez also noted that the CNE has agreed to provide the Rosales camp with a copy of the overall preliminary results before they are announced, thus giving the campaign another check against fraud.

110. (SBU) After casting their electronic ballots, voters will receive a computer-generated printed receipt that they are supposed to place in a sealed cardboard box. Local electoral officials, in the presence of witnesses from the Chavez and Rosales campaigns, will open boxes chosen by lottery, as stated in the electoral rules, to count the votes registered on the printed receipts in those boxes. The number of boxes opened at each center depends on the number of voting tables,

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but overall constitutes 54 percent of all ballots cast. A number of informal technical advisors to the Rosales campaign are stressing that the selection of boxes must be random, otherwise the government could skew results by adding virtual votes at selected polling tables. Rosales' witnesses will also transmit these results to campaign headquarters where they will be scrutinized in relation to the CNE's official results.

111. (C) Rosales campaign advisers acknowledge that having trained witnesses covering all polling places is pivotal to their fraud deterrence-detection strategy. At the same time, they concede that so far the campaign currently can deploy trained witnesses to little over two-thirds of the polling centers. Electoral NGO Sumate representatives tell us that they are training Rosales' witnesses, but Rosales does not have sufficient volunteers to cover all the polls. Rosales' campaign folks, however, complain to us that Sumate's training efforts have been inadequate.

112. (C) Rosales campaign adviser Alejandro Vivas told us that the parallel tabulation work will be done by a firm in Sinaloa, Mexico using software ("PREP") that Calderon used in the recent Mexican election. PAN is paying the Mexican firm

directly for that technical support, according to Vivas. The Rosales campaign will cover the costs of the data collection in Venezuela and implement a quick count based on the results from 300 voting centers. In addition, the Rosales campaign is hiring four separate polling firms to conduct exit polls. Arias told the Ambassador November 16 that the Rosales camp expects the first exit poll results two hours after the polls open, and new ones at two-to-three-hour intervals thereafter.

Defending the Vote

¶13. (C) The Rosales campaign is also planning to "respond" to any perceived BRV electoral abuses. Belloso told poloffs that during Rosales' successful 2004 re-election defense of his Zulia governorship, intending Rosales voters at some centers received electronic receipts that indicated that they had just voted for the pro-government candidate. The Rosales camp called Smartmatic, the machine operating company, and threatened to burn voting machines if Smartmatic did not fix the problem. Smartmatic fixed its Zulia machines in one hour, Belloso said. The Rosales campaign has set up teams of experts to deal with any "technical" problems that emerge starting December 1 when the voting tables are first set up in the voting centers.

¶14. (C) In addition, the Rosales campaign has issued a general call for its supporters to linger outside their voting centers starting around 4:00 p.m. The Rosales folks believe having people outside the polling stations will help ensure that local election officials follow vote transmission and audit procedures scrupulously. They also concede that they are going to be able to mobilize large groups of people only in some Rosales strongholds. Rosales adviser Arrias told the Ambassador that he expects some election day violence, regardless of the outcome. If Chavez is losing, the Rosales campaign anticipates that he will mobilize his loyal supporters. Conversely, if Rosales is losing by a small margin, Arrias said "we can't expect the people to sit quietly and accept defeat."

Comment

¶15. (C) The Rosales campaign appears better prepared to deter and detect electoral fraud than the opposition has ever been in the past. Should Chavez win by a narrow margin, the Rosales camp will almost certainly try to persuade the Venezuelan public, international observers, and us that Chavez has stolen the election. And this time, the opposition appears to be taking the right steps to assemble quickly credible evidence of election fraud. While Rosales and his team are prudent in preparing to respond to such scenarios, President Chavez continues to enjoy considerable electoral advantages, and the Rosales camp probably lacks both the resources and time necessary to pull a major electoral upset.

WHITAKER